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LITTLE BLIND JOE

BY
N. S. Wood

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LITTLE BLIND JOE;

OR,

THE SHARKS OF NEW YORK.

By N. S. WOOD,

Author of "From Newsboy Up; or, A New York Boy in Business," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I. THE STOLEN WATCH.

THE cold, tempestuous March wind was wailing a sad requiem through the rainy streets of Gotham, rattling the lamp-posts, rustling the skeleton branches of the trees and scurrying over the house-tops like a fiend.

There were very few pedestrians or vehicles exposed to the inclemency of the weather, very few lights in the shop windows, and very few happy hearts among the poor in the great metropolis on that dismal night.

Perhaps in a certain sense there is not a gloomier spot in the city than the confines of Roosevelt street, from the river front upward, and more particularly in the vicinity of the church surmounted by the fiery cross.

It is the abode of hidden mystery and secret crime, the stamping ground of the nefarious and the refuge of a peculiar class, cankering and festering the roseate side of the commercial center, a veritable sink of vice.

The slums go hand in hand with the more pretentious thoroughfares, as an oddly assorted contrast, the denizens of one jostling the habits of the other, broadcloth and rags thronging along, the riches shunning the poverty, and the scale of society exhibiting thereby a marked division.

There was a person standing on a corner thinking of this in a different way, perhaps, yet the boy's mind engrossed the strong contrast just as legibly.

He was a thin and sickly-looking object, with the face and form of a boy no more than fifteen years of age, but possessing a warped mind of considerable maturity.

Of clothing there was little upon his emaciated figure—a tattered jacket and pants of some black stuff, a ragged and dirty shirt open at the throat, and an old felt hat—that was all.

He had a pinched and wan face, rather coarse in its general outlines, big blue eyes, a sharp nose, and high cheek bones, that lent his white features a haggard expression.

The light of the street lamp fell upon him in a dull way, and he pushed his matted chestnut hair from off his face, paid no heed to wind or rain, but shivering and moving his bare feet, as the sharp cold penetrated to his very bones, one hand clasped the lamp post, and he began to whistle softly to himself, and think:

"I wonder why Grimsby don't come? I don't like the brute. But if I go away until he comes back and takes me home, he will give me a terrible beating. So I guess I will wait. He was going to get me a pair of shoes when that man met and walked away with him."

Grimsby must have been a terror to the boy's soul, for even as he thought of that individual he could hardly repress a violent shudder and a look of intense disgust.

Somewhere near the boy a bell chimed the hour of ten.

He listened, stopped his whistling, and when the last dull clang ceased to boom on the heavy air, a sigh parted his lips, and he muttered in plaintive tones:

"I've been here two hours now. I wish he'd come. Not that I am anxious to get back among the sharks—oh, no! But that terrible place is much better than these cold, rainy streets. Maybe Grimsby is up to some of his games with the man he met here on the corner, and that is why he stays so long. I shouldn't wonder. He's a bad one. The stranger spoke nice like—much as if he was a gentleman."

A look of fear swept over the boy's white face.

His ruminations were taking a singular turn.

"What if Grimsby should rob him?" he muttered. "It's just as like as not. He's a bad one, out and out. The man accused him of crime done for him twelve years ago, and Grimsby was scared, and said he'd rather talk the matter over and explain things under shelter, and the man went with him. I wonder who he was and what he knew about Grimsby?"

He stood pondering over the question an instant, when suddenly he heard the hurried patter of bare feet on the pavement, approaching him from the direction of the river.

Then there sounded the rush of a body behind him, and he received a bump that sent him reeling back several paces, uttering a stifled cry of alarm.

The lamp-light streamed down upon a panting boy, about two years older than himself.

He was a tough specimen, clad in a suit of clothes much too big for him, barefooted and hatless.

The bottoms of his patched pants were rolled up, no buttons were upon his ill-fitting and sloven coat, and he wore a red flannel shirt, full of holes.

He was a red-haired boy with a bullet head, a pug nose covered with freckles, and had one sharp, gimlet eye, that twinkled in his broad, flat face most maliciously.

The moment he centered his solitary optic upon the other boy, he seized him by the arm, thrust a gold watch in his hand, a piece of chain attached to the time-piece looking as if it had been broken, and gasped in hurried tones, as he gave the little fellow a violent push:

"Run! Run fer all yer worth wid dis. It's swiped, an' der copper's hot on ter me, wid der flat who owns it!"

"Oh! It is Snags!" gasped the little fellow.

"Snake away!" roughly replied the other. "Snake, I tell yer!"

He showed an ugly set of teeth as he spoke, shook his hulking figure, and venting a sibilant hiss, he glanced over his shoulder in the direction he had come from.

Down the street he saw the dim, shadowy figures of a policeman and a citizen whom he had robbed, coming along at a run toward him.

Their shoes clattered on the silent pavements, and the man was shouting "stop thief" at every step, as they drew nearer.

"What is this?" gasped the boy, holding up the watch.

"I've pickled a lil, an' fammed der Charley," said Snags, in the choicest thieves' slang. "Now skit, or der fly copper 'll nab yer, me bloomin' jiblets, an' maker yer do time. Ez fer me, I'm agoin' ter chase myself to Utopia!"

He dodged into a dark entry and disappeared.

The little fellow heard him go, and a look of fear overspread his face as he passed his hand over the watch.

"If they catch me, I'll go to jail, as Snags says," he muttered. "I'd best cut and run, for I hear them coming up the street. I won't go to prison—I've never been in one, and I'll risk Grimsby's beating when he finds me gone."

He thrust the watch into his pocket, and turned to run away as he heard those flying footsteps nearing.

The instincts of his earliest training asserted themselves, for Nick Grimsby had brought him up in an atmosphere of rank knavery, against which his nature rebelled, but he was educated to fear the police, anyhow.

From infancy he was a forced associate of depraved boys, at the resort infested by the young sharks of Gotham, but for a very stringent reason, the boy never had done a wrong action to make himself amenable to the law.

He had not gone ten paces, when a hand fell heavily upon his shoulder, and a coarse voice exclaimed:

"Howld on, ye blackguard! I've got yer!"

"Oh!" cried the boy, brought to a sudden halt.

"That isn't him, officer!" panted another voice close by.

"Begorra, it can't be anny wan else. Luck at ther broken watch-chain a-danglin' out av his pocket, sor."

"It was Snags!" cried the terrified boy.

"Shure, an' it lucked loike Schnags," assented the policeman, tightening his grip with one hand, and jerking the watch out of the boy's pocket with the other, "an' it's itchin' me hands be's ter git ther howld av his neck. But he's a goner, an' plaze ther saints, it's his 'ool pigeon Oi hev in me fisht!"

The excited gentleman took the watch and bent a sharp scrutiny upon the panting boy.

"This certainly is my time-piece!" he exclaimed.

"An' bedad, sor, this certainly is ther other wan's friend!"

"Shall I make a charge against him, officer?"

"Bechune the two av us, yer'd betther, Mr. Crosscut."

The little boy shivered at the gloomy prospect, and a violent start pervaded him upon hearing the policeman utter the gentleman's peculiar name.

He had heard it mentioned before that night under different circumstances, and knew of the gentleman in question.

But he was not going to jail, and he manifested this intention by suddenly jerking himself free from the policeman's detaining hand.

He rushed against the officer, and the latter personage, being taken by surprise, fell over, struck Mr. Crosscut, and together they fell to the sidewalk.

The boy heard them fall, sprang away and ran up the dark, gloomy thoroughfare as fast as he could go, only fifty yards separating him from the others, when he heard them come on in hot pursuit of him again.

On he dashed at the height of his speed, passing over two blocks, until he came to a cross street; he turned to the right, crossed over, followed the street a ways, and hearing his pursuers still on his track, he suddenly paused before a brick house, ran up a blind alley, met a low stoop crossing it, fell up two stairs and went sprawling through a side door.

He fell upon the oil-cloth of a hall in the dark, and hastily scrambled to his feet and listened.

The sound of voices near by reached his ears, then a cry.

"Murder!" was the muffled shriek that thrilled him.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING ADVENTURE.

AN undefinable sensation of dread passed over the boy as that smothered cry of horror reached his ears.

He was enshrouded in impenetrable darkness in the hall of a

strange house, the location of which he did not know, and was pursued as a thief for the crime that another person committed.

Frightened as he was by the cry he heard, portending that some miserable mortal was in dire distress, he did not dare to escape into the streets again for fear that the officer would arrest him outside.

So he stood stock still and listened intently, his big blue eyes rolling, his thin face drawn, and his puny limbs quaking as if palsied.

The boy raised his hands, touched the wall, and groping his way, glided along the dark hall.

Near by him he could hear muffled sounds as if a violent struggle was going on.

Then he heard a door crash open behind him, and the sound of a heavy footfall in the hall.

At the same juncture his hand touched an open doorway, and to avoid being seen by the person behind him he glided through into a room.

It was a dark apartment, at one end of which a doorway was hung with chenille portiers, through the middle opening of which a streak of light shot in, piercing the gloom.

He moved forward, and his hands touched the curtains.

Then he stood still and listened.

Not a sound was to be heard save the moaning of the wind outside and the pattering of the rain drops against the panes of the back windows.

The boy only waited an instant, then he glided forward and entering the other room he stumbled over something lying in the middle of the floor.

Falling flat upon his face, he struck something so much like a human figure that it sent a shudder flying through his system.

He hastily got up on his knees.

Then he felt around, and his fingers touched a cold, clammy face, wringing an involuntary ejaculation of alarm from his pale lips.

He recoiled for an instant, then his deft fingers ran up and down and all around the body.

There was no doubt it was the figure of a man, and the clothing seemed to be of some woolen texture.

He wore a flannel shirt, and his hair was cropped close to his head, upon his cold face was only a goatee, the rest being shaved close to the skin.

The boy then felt of both of his hands, and although they were as cold as ice, there was nothing remarkable about the right hand; the left, though, was maimed.

The third finger was gone, and a ring was upon the second, which slipped off into the boy's hand.

He felt of it very carefully, and judged that the stone was a diamond of large size, while inside two initials were engraved rather deeply, which he made out to be "D. H."

The boy put the ring into his jacket pocket.

His hands again flew nervously over the body and came to a pause on the side.

He started as they became wet with something sticky and rested upon a slender object protruding from amid the damp clothing that felt singularly like the hilt of a knife with a round, hard handle.

There was a ball upon the end, with two small flat substances imbedded, one on each side, that felt cold and smooth, very much indeed like agate.

The startled boy could not be deceived of the seeming truth.

"The man was murdered!" he gasped.

Then he sprang to his feet.

He went around the room, and his quick fingers touching different objects, gave him knowledge of his surroundings almost as well as if he could see them.

A table and two chairs were overturned upon the floor, curtains and shades hung at the windows, a piano stood in one corner, and a clock ticked upon the mantelpiece.

There were deep-framed pictures on the walls, velvet carpet upon the floor, rugs scattered about, and at one side of the room he heard a strange buzzing noise.

It sounded as if there were a machine in the adjoining building in motion, despite the lateness of the hour, for he could hear the rumble of belting and the hissing of steam.

Then he returned to the side of the body, and, reaching upward, his hand encountered a chandelier, with cut-glass pendants, that jingled at his touch.

He had hardly lowered his hands again, when he was startled by feeling some one seize him by his right arm and give him a shove.

He spun around and tottered back against a small table, holding a piece of statuary that fell to the floor with a loud crash, and was shattered to fragments.

Then there ensued two voices whispering.

"It is a boy!" said one.

"Seen all?" muttered the other.

Something whizzed by the little fellow's face.

He did not move an inch.

"No, he is blind!" came the first voice.

The boy's staring big blue eyes seemed to belie this assertion, but it was nevertheless true.

The two voices whispered together again a moment.

The boy's keen ears were upon the alert, and he was sure he heard one of the men say:

"He's little blind Joe."

That his identity was known to these men there could be no question in the little fellow's mind.

The room was ablaze with light, but he could not see them or anything of his surroundings.

Yet outside of the two men, whose voices were so smothered, he had a pretty fair idea of the appearance of the room he was in, and the looks of the inanimate body lying on the floor under the chandelier.

He was not left long to meditate, for a footstep approached him, and although he stepped back nervously his arm was clutched in a powerful grip, and he heard a muffled voice say:

"You come along with me!"

"Let go of my arm," the boy muttered.

"No!" hissed the muffled voice, savagely; "you cannot remain in here. Already you may know too much."

"I can see nothing, sir."

"But you have the sense of touch."

"Let me go, will you?"

"I will not. Now tell me what you know."

"Nothing," exclaimed Joe, struggling to get away.

"You lie! Admit the truth. I know you."

"I can't see, I tell you!"

"Bah! Your fingers are as keen as eyes."

"What do you want me to say?"

"How came you in here?"

"Chased by the police, I ran in the alley, and got in the side door only a moment ago, sir."

"That is why I found the door open."

"I suppose it is."

"You have been feeling around this room?"

"Well, so I have. You saw me, maybe."

"And you discovered what laid on the floor?"

"Yes—a man, I believe."

"What else?"

"Nothing, except he is senseless."

Joe heard the other sigh, as if relieved.

"Do you know where you are?" was the next question.

"No. How could I tell?"

"I believe you. Do you know Snags?"

"Ah! Yes! He nearly got me in trouble to-night."

"How was that?"

"Well, he stole a watch and pocket-book."

"There is nothing strange in that—for him."

"True enough, sir. He is a bad one. But he handed me the watch, while passing, and told me to run with it, to throw the policeman and the gentleman off his track. I feared arrest, but didn't want to steal, so I ran. They caught me, though, and got the watch back. Then I managed to break away. It was while they were after me I dodged in here."

"Oh! I see!" said the man, in louder tones.

The boy jumped, as the voice became undisguised in an unguarded moment, and he exclaimed:

"Oh! I know you! You are Mr. Crosscut himself!"

The man uttered a savage expletive.

He was vexed with himself for betraying his identity to the boy, and exclaimed in angry tones:

"You are mistaken. Here—take him!"

The blind boy felt something come up to his face, a pungent odor assailed his nostrils, and he felt his senses rapidly leaving him.

"I am drugged!" he exclaimed.

Then he fell back, deprived of all consciousness.

CHAPTER III.

NICK GRIMSBY.

WHEN little blind Joe recovered consciousness, he found himself in Nick Grimsby's resort, suffering from a violent headache, induced by his having been drugged, and the light of the ensuing day was upon the earth.

The storm had passed away, and the boy wondered how he got home, half imagining that the events marking the preceding night were only a bad dream.

The place in which he found himself was the same pestiferous dive in which all of his young life, as far back as he could remember, had been passed.

It was a wretched cellar, in a tumble-down old house, on Roosevelt street, not far from the corner on which Grimsby had left him standing the night previous, and was a resort for a gang of the most depraved young scoundrels in the city of New York.

Grimsby was a person of sinister character.

His life was half spent in prisons, the other half being devoted to stray jobs at different crimes, and in reaping a golden harvest from the spoils gathered by the infantile ruffians, who, under his proficient instruction in the different phases of crime, scoured the city, and plied their nefarious avocations.

He was a burly rascal, of ferocious mien, and governed a band of ten boys, whose ages ranged from twelve to twenty years, all of whom had proven to be adept scholars in the science of robbery and general depredation.

How he came to be possessed of little blind Joe was a mystery that none of the young landsharks could fathom, but they imagined the boy was his son, he claiming such to be the fact, and although they did not believe him, they dared not tell him so.

The truth was, though, that if Joe was his son, he treated the little fellow with more savage cruelty than he did any other boy in the place, upon the slightest provocation.

The cellar was a dismal place, strongly scented with rank tobacco and rum fumes, its only daylight coming in through a door at the head of a flight of stone stairs that ran up to the street.

The front compartment looked much like a drinking saloon, with its filthy bar, tables and chairs, sanded floor, and a motley crowd of young ragamuffins lounging around, talking, sleeping and fighting.

Behind the bar stood the boy Snags, trimming a dingy lamp that diffused a sickly glimmer upon the scene, from a rack over a cracked mirror.

Several of the tough looking boys were smoking cigar butts and playing cards in a corner, a mop-headed youth with a broken nose laid his head on his arms on a table and was fast asleep, while another youth, in a semi-decent suit, stood in a corner devouring a cheese sandwich and a raw onion.

Grimsby had gone out, leaving the place in care of his most devoted follower, the slick fingered Snags.

A partition divided the cellar in two.

Little blind Joe had been sleeping in the rear apartment, until he recovered from the lethargy produced by the drug, and sat up in a chair near the stove.

This apartment was a grade better than the other, the floor being clean, a bed and several cots scattered along the cobwebbed walls, and a table, standing under a lamp fixture at the end, showing the remnants of a meal of which Grimsby's proteges had partaken.

The little boy groped his way to the sink in a corner, and bathed his throbbing temples with cold water to alleviate the pain he was enduring.

He had hardly done so when the door opened and Grimsby came bustling into the room, and glared around to see what had become of Joe.

He was a burly man of about forty, with a short, thick set figure, clad in a rough suit, and having a square-jawed face, covered with bristles of dirty brown.

He was cross-eyed and greasy complexioned, his forehead low and retreating, his ears big and standing out, while his nose was mashed flat on his face.

As the repulsive brute centered his crossed optics on the little blind boy, a peculiar look passed over his face.

The boy knew his footstep, and paused in an attitude of listening expectancy, with an expression of fear.

Grimsby saw it, and a grim look shot from his ugly green eyes, and hovered around his thick-lipped mouth.

"Joe!" he exclaimed in coarse tones.

"Yes, Grimsby—what is it? I am here," said the boy.

"Why didn't yer wait fer me las' night?"

"I did, Grimsby, up to ten o'clock."

"Well!" roared the brute, "didn't I say ter wait till I came back? An' wuz that ther way yer do wot I tells yer? Gosh hang yer ugly mug, I'll smash yer!"

He doubled up his fist, and although he had a grin on his face, and an amused expression, too, he dealt the blind boy a terrible blow, knocking him across the room.

Poor Joe uttered a sharp cry of pain, and fell to the floor in a heap, his wan little face cut and bleeding.

"There's a power in adoin' that!" muttered Grimsby, gazing reflectively at his unhappy little victim. "He thinks as I'm on'y adoin' it to amuse myself, ther young wiper! But I ain't. I'll make him think I'm bilin' mad, so's he won't suspect I wuz with Mr. Crosscut las' night, in ther room wi' ther body wot he foun'! Oh, there's a heap o' diplomacy in me, ef I do look like a bull dog."

Joe got up sobbing, and cried in pitiful tones:

"Oh, don't beat me, Grimsby. I couldn't help going away."

"Yes, yer could, yer little tagger cub!" growled the burly cracksmen. "Yes, yer could! Gosh blame yer, I want my kids ter obey me, I do. When I sez a thing I means it, I do! Stop yer snivelin', d'yer hear?"

Joe tried to cease his crying but it was of no use, for the sobs would come, and the bitter tears of woe would insist upon rolling down his cheeks.

"I c-c-can't!" he cried. "Let me be, Grimsby."

"I'll pump ther young warmint," muttered Grimsby, in speculative tones. "He's a cute 'un, an' mebbe he knows more'n 'ud be safe fer a cove!"

He caught the boy by his arm and pulled him over near the edge of the bed, upon which he sat.

Joe was trembling like an aspen.

He feared some new cruelty at the brute's hands.

"Please—please do not beat me, Grimsby!" he said pleadingly.

"I'll tell you all about it, and you will—"

"Shut up!" interrupted the man. "Now answer me."

"Answer what, Grimsby?"

"I want ax yer some questions, I do."

"I will answer anything, Grimsby."

"Then, gosh hang yer, how did yer come ter git in that ere house las' night, an' wot did yer see there?"

The boy recited his adventure to the man, only omitting his discovery of the man's appearance, the dagger, his possession of the ring and what he learned of the appearance of the room.

"An' don't yer know where the house is?" asked the burglar savagely. "No lies, either, yer wiper, or be gosh, I'll hammer ther life out yer!"

"No, I don't. I don't know how I got home even."

"Well, yer waz brung in by certain parties."

"Grimsby, I think—I think there was a—a crime done in that house last night."

The burglar started, and a dark look crossed his face.

"Wot makes yer think that?" he asked.

"Well, that man's body was so cold and still it seemed to me as if he was dead."

"Can't a feller die widout being murdered?"

"Yes—but his bosom was wet, as if it was soaked with blood, and, oh, he was so lifeless—"

"But hev yer got any reasons besides that fer a-thinking ez there wuz fogl play—say? Speak out now!"

"No! None," said the boy.

This assurance seemed to relieve Grimsby considerably.

"Then I wants yer ter keep yer convictions to yerself," said he. "There's enough fly coppers a-buzzin' aroun' me urready widout you a-startin' a sensation ter bring more o' 'em—d'yer hear? Now you keep still, mind yer."

"I won't say anything, Grimsby."

The burglar seemed perfectly satisfied that the boy would keep his word, and telling him not to go out, he left the apartment to talk to Snags in the next room.

Joe then fell into a train of thought.

"This is a queer affair," he muttered. "Grimsby must know something about it, or he would have acted very much different. Besides, he must have had a hand in bringing me home—how else could I have gotten here? The man he met last night was Mr. Crosscut. He went off with him, then they must have separated, for soon afterwards Snags robbed the gentleman. Grimsby could not have been with him at the time. When Mr. Crosscut and the policeman chased me the gentleman entered the house where I found that body, for I knew his voice the moment I heard it loud. What can the mystery of this crime be, I wonder? Could Grimsby be implicated? He must be. Indeed, it must have been him and Mr. Crosscut who did the job! But—what for?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHARKS.

WHILE Joe was engrossed in thought, he heard the street door open and a gentleman entered the dive.

Grimsby had gone down in a sub-cellar, after speaking to Snags, and was not in the room when the new-comer entered and surprised the boys.

They all looked up at him, a quick flash of intelligence passed from one to the other, and one by one they edged up to the gentleman and surrounded him.

He was a person of about thirty, with a blonde mustache, a stylish suit, and wore a high silk hat.

The young sharks imagined they had a most easy prey, thinking he was a stray dandy who was on a spree, and had accidentally stumbled into the dive.

Surrounding him in a body they all began to ply him with questions, their deft fingers meantime rapidly going through his pockets, relieving him of all his valuables.

"I don't want to drink with any of you!" he exclaimed, angrily, as he pushed them away from him in disgust, having discovered their depredations upon his person.

"I want to see Nick Grimsby—is he in?"

This question was addressed to Snags, as the young thieves fell away from him, and Snags looked up.

His solitary eye suddenly popped out of his head, and a rather scared look crossed his ugly face, for he recognized the gentleman before him as the one from whom he had stolen a watch and pocket-book the night previous down the street.

In a word, he was Mr. Crosscut.

It only occupied a moment for Snags to recover from his trepidation, and turning to the boys, he uttered a warning cry and hissed in low tones, before the man could utter a word:

"Tackle his mibs! Go fer der bloke! He's der cull wot's Charley I swiped, who brung a copper after me!"

The young rogues took the initiative at once, and closing in around the alarmed man before he could defend himself, they knocked him down and fell upon him in a body.

He began to shout for help, fearing they meant to murder him. Snags ran out from behind the dingy bar, and the whole squirming mass of humanity had reached the height of the struggle, when up came Grimsby, alarmed at the noise.

"Gosh darn yer, wot's ther matter here?" he yelled.

Snags disengaged himself from the crowd, and replied:

"A fakir comed in wot I nailed las' night."

"Who is he?" demanded Grimsby.

"I dunno."

"Then scatter, youse fellers, and let him up."

The boys obeyed this mandate with alacrity.

Mr. Crosscut struggled to his feet, looking badly used up, very much excited and covered with dirt.

"Grimsby," he exclaimed frantically, "save me."

"By the piper, it's Mr. Crosscut!"

"They are killing me! Call them off!"

"G'long there, yer warmints!" yelled Grimsby to the skulking young rascals. "He's a pertickler frien' o' mine, blast yer bones, an' I'r ashamed o' yez."

The man felt of his pockets in dismay.

They were all rifled and turned completely inside out.

"I have been robbed!" he exclaimed.

Grimsby's cross eyes sparkled amusedly.

"Shell out!" he exclaimed to his minions.

They sulkily obeyed, returning the man all they had taken, and he then pointed at Snags.

"That's the young scoundrel who robbed me last night after I left you, Grimsby," said he.

"Wot, Snags? Ho, ho, ho!"

"He got away with my wallet."

"Oh, don't worry—you'll git it again! Snags!"

"Well—wha'd'yer want?"

"Shell out!"

And out came the missing pocket-book like magic.

He handed it back to the owner, and said apologetically:

"Here yer are. I didn't know dat yer wuz a frien' o' der boss', er I don't tink I'd a hooked it."

Mr. Crosscut scowled at him, as he made an awkward bow of cool indifference, and turning to Grimsby he said:

"I want to speak to you privately."

He flashed a significant look at the burglar, which Grimsby seemed to perfectly understand, for he replied:

"Oh! Yair—I ain't fergot it. C'mon upstairs!"

The gentlemanly personage nodded, and preceding his guest, Grimsby passed through the other room, and saw Joe huddled up in a heap in a corner near the sink, crying and sobbing softly to himself.

The boy had overheard all that passed in the front room, and recognizing the new-comer as the person who had drugged him in the house of the mysterious crime, he had hoped to evade his observation by crouching down where he did.

His head was upon his arms, his arms on his knees, and his knees before his face.

The gentleman glanced at him curiously, but being unable to see his face he passed on after his ugly looking companion.

There was a wooden flight of stairs outside the back door, and Grimsby ascended without more than a glance at the blind boy.

Joe heard them walking on a bare floor overhead a few moments later, and then arose.

There was a frightened expression upon his face.

"That man again!" he muttered. "Why has he come here to see Grimsby? It can't be for any good. I'd like to know what it is that makes them so intimate. He was here once before, and I listened to what they said up there. Why couldn't I do it again?"

What the boy overheard on the former occasion did not fill his soul with much trust in the gentlemanly-looking personage's honor.

There was some talk of Grimsby aiding him to get his step-brother out of the way so that he could gain possession of a large estate.

The property was owned by Mr. Crosscut's step-father—that individual died, leaving it to his wife, and Mr. Crosscut's step-brother was to inherit it when the lady died. If the step-brother was dead, it would go to Mr. Crosscut, and to secure his title to it, Mr. Crosscut wanted his step-brother abducted. He was always at variance with his step-brother, and they hated each other cordially from the time their parents were married.

Joe had learned this much already, and he now began to suspect that the unfortunate step-brother was the man who had been fatally stabbed the night before to culminate Mr. Crosscut's plot.

It was reasonable to suppose this was the case, at any rate, and the boy dreaded the man, as if he were some monster, for his perfidy.

Perhaps it was Grimsby who did the deed.

Joe knew he was capable of it.

The blind boy was filled with curiosity over the matter into which he had been so strangely drawn, and knowing that he could risk going up-stairs to listen to the men's conversation without much fear of detection, he accordingly quitted the room by the back door and ascended to the next floor.

Reaching the upper hall without making any noise, on the ground floor of the tenement, he softly made his way to the front room door, opened it, went in, and crept up to a door communicating with the rear apartment, into which the two men had gone.

The room Joe was in was empty, as was the other, and the intervening door seemed to have been locked.

Hearing the hum of voices, the boy leaned against the door and intently listened to the conversation.

"He wasn't killed outright," the stranger was saying.

"But, gosh blame it, he must have been!" growled Grimsby.

"No; the knife penetrated the side."

"He wuz cold an' lifeless."

"Animation was only partly suspended temporarily."

"He can't live nohow, I'll bet ten cases!"

"No; he is sinking now."

"Wat's ter be did?"

"As soon as he is dead we will bury him in the cellar."

"Where did you put him?"

"Up in the hall bedroom. Couldn't we bring him here? That boy may know enough to get us in trouble."

"Don't yer believe it. He's as blind as a bat."

"I don't want to run any risks, Grimsby."

"Then we'll fetch him ter-night an' bury him here."

"Very well. I'll have a coach ready."

"An' my money?"

"You will get it as soon as he arrives here. I don't feel safe keeping him in the house. It's securer here. Come around with the boys to-day. They can protect us against accidents."

Suddenly Joe sneezed.

The room was full of dust, which he had stirred up, and, inhaling it, he could not restrain himself.

He hardly had time to step back in dismay, when Grimsby uttered a warning cry, rushed across the room, and flung open the door, disclosing the blind boy.

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

JOE knew that he was discovered and that flight would be perfectly useless; for blind as he was, he could not see where he was going, and Grimsby would have an easy job of it to catch him.

He heard the thief rush up, and the next instant he received a blow that almost stunned him.

"It's ther blin' brat!" exclaimed Grimsby, furiously.

"Eavesdropping, eh?" queried Mr. Crosscut.

"Ay, gosh dang him! Take that! an' that! an' that!"

With every word he pounded, cuffed and kicked the poor little fellow, knocking him down on the floor in a daze, trampling on him, pulling him up on his feet, punching him and swearing at him in a revolting manner.

Joe was dumbstricken.

The first brutal crash of that brawny fist almost rendered him senseless, and the ensuing thumps and kicks only served to pain him to the verge of total numbness.

He was dashed to the floor screaming; after a moment's respite, the inhuman rascal tore his hair out by handfuls, and his body became rigid, welted, black and blue, cut and bruised, in a few moments, so that he felt as if he had been drawn through a threshing machine.

Even the obdurate, callous-hearted Crosscut was moved to compassion to see the savage ferocity of the brute.

"Let him be—you will kill him!" he exclaimed, as the boy fell over on his back in the middle of the floor, pale, gasping, and with bulging eyes.

"I don't care!" roared Grimsby, wrathily. "Ther little wiper! I told him not ter go out. An' here he's sneaked up an' be'n a listenin' ter wot we've said. Ugh!"

He gave the boy another savage kick, and poor little Joe uttered an intense groan of misery, staggered to his feet, crouched back against the wall, and moaned:

"Don't, Grimsby, don't! You will kill me!"

"That's wot yer gits fer yer pryin'!" exclaimed the brute.

"Oh! I am in such pain!" moaned the writhing boy.

"Leave him be, I tell you," remonstrated Crosscut.

He was getting frightened, for the boy looked as if he were dying, his big blue eyes starting from their sockets, his teeth clenched, and his little hands, shaking and cold, raised as if to ward off another cruel blow.

Crosscut saw Grimsby glaring at the boy malevolently, his cross eyes bloodshot, and his face red with passion; and seizing the burly rascal in a tenacious grip, he pulled him back and shoved him toward the door.

"You le'me be!" growled Grimsby. "I'll fix him!"

"No, you won't. You've done enough already. The poor little wretch is blind and can't help himself. I'm bad enough, but such a sight is too much for me."

"Looker wot he's heerd. Ain't yer got no regard fer safety?"

"He cannot injure us, I guess. Besides, if Dan is brought here he will know it, anyhow. If you can trust the rest of your boys why can't you trust this one?"

"Oh, he's different from ther rest. He's got a conscience, he is, an' them others ain't. Besides, he might blab if he gits ther chance, an' I ain't a-goin' ter hev none o' that. I knows him better'n you do, Mr. Crosscut, fer I've brung him up."

The man was silent, and Joe began to grope his way toward the door, to get out of the room.

The burglar's glance fell upon him again and he roared:

"Now, you git down-stairs, an' when this gent is gone you'll catch it hot from me ag'in."

He pointed at the door, but poor Joe could not see him.

The boy was sobbing and crept to the door, passed out, and went groaning down the back stairs, while the two men returned to the room they emerged from and resumed the conversation Joe had so unwittingly interrupted.

When Joe got down-stairs he found the boys sitting in a circle in the front cellar, with Snags in their midst, discussing a topic of absorbing interest.

They were, as usual, to go off on their nocturnal prow! in quest of human prey, and Snags was laying out their plans for them.

Joe listened a few moments and then crept over to the street door unnoticed by the rest.

"I won't stay any longer!" he muttered. "I will go away now. It is far better to starve in the streets than remain here and put up with this kind of life. Anyhow Grimsby would kill me in time."

And having come to this conclusion he glided out the door, up the stone steps, and hurried away.

The poor little unfortunate had no idea where to go except to get as far away from Grimsby's place as possible, and never return there.

When he had gained a distance of several blocks from Grimsby's place he bethought himself of what he had heard the rascally boys plotting.

"It is a helpless woman they mean to rob," he mused, "and she has no protection, and don't know that they mean to do her any injury. I'll go to her house and warn her so that she will be able to get help when they arrive."

The young sharks had mentioned the location of the house, and Joe began to inquire of passing pedestrians the way toward East Broadway.

When he finally reached that thoroughfare he asked for a certain number, and was finally brought to a pause in front of a plain, two-storied brick house.

Ring the bell he heard a servant open the door.

"We haven't got nuthin' for beggars to-day!" she snapped.

"But I am not a beggar, ma'am," the boy replied.

The servant did not believe him, though.

So she slammed the door shut with a bang.

Joe was filled with dread.

"I must tell the lady," he muttered. "If I don't, she will get robbed by the sharks and I'll be to blame for it."

Scared at this idea he banged at the door with his clenched fists, and it suddenly flew open again.

"Now you clear out of this!" exclaimed the irate girl. "There's no use in you stayin' here kicking up a rumpus, for I'll have you arrested if you keep on."

"Don't drive me away, ma'am," pleaded the boy. "I did no harm, and I want to tell you something—"

"Mary—who is it?" called a sweet voice just then.

"A beggar, Mrs. Howell."

"I ain't, I tell you!" exclaimed Joe.

"Let me see," said the other woman.

She appeared in the doorway a moment later, and glanced at the little blind boy curiously.

Then she started and stared harder.

She was a woman of about thirty-five, medium-sized, dressed in black, had dark hair and eyes, and a face of singular sweetness of expression.

The boy could not see her, but the inflexions of her voice were quite enough to tell him she was kind hearted.

He held up his bruised hands, and said:

"If you are the lady who lives here, do not drive me away until I tell you how you are to be robbed."

"Robbed!" echoed the lady, in amazed tones.

"Yes, ma'am, by the sharks."

"Sharks? What do you mean?"

"The thieves in Roosevelt street call themselves the Young Sharks, and Snags, their leader, put up the job on you."

The lady seemed to be very much startled.

Moreover, there was something about the boy's face that seemed to rivet her gaze upon him, as if by some strange fascination.

"Come in here and explain what you mean," she said.

Joe took a step forward and stumbled.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, catching at the balustrade.

"What is the matter with you?" gasped the lady.

"I am blind," Joe replied.

"Good heaven! Is this a strange fatality? Can he be the same? Come here—give me your hand."

She was excessively excited, grasped Joe's hand and drew him inside the hall and into the parlor, the servant following with a look of disgust on her face.

Joe was surprised, and when she paused he gasped:

"What did you do that for?"

"I am strangely interested in you, child. What is your name?"

"Joe—simply Joe."

"Have you no other name?"

"Not as I know, ma'am."

"Where do you live?"

"In Roosevelt street with Grimsby, the burglar."

"Is he your father?"

"I don't know—he says he is."

The lady paused an instant, then said:

"Tell me why you came here?"

"To warn you that Grimsby's pupils—the Young Sharks—mean to rob you to-night. I overheard their plot, and came to put you on your guard. They have been watching this house a week, saw no man around—only you and the servant, and Snags followed her yesterday and snatched her latch key away from her so they could get in to-night."

"Ah! So Snags is the name of that young rascal!" the irate servant remarked. "I told you about it, ma'am."

"I shall inform the police at once," said the lady. "You go, Mary, to the station-house. I will keep the boy here."

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXPOSURE.

THE room into which Mrs. Howell had led Joe was a parlor, very handsomely appointed, and dimly lighted.

The servant donned her bonnet, and went out to apprise the police of what Joe said.

Left alone with the boy, the lady sat down on the sofa beside him, and bending a searching glance upon his face she studied it a moment, with a peculiar, nervous expression:

"Do you know," she said in low tones, "you remind me of a child I once had, that was stolen from me years ago—a blind babe, which would now be your age."

"Do I?" asked Joe, with deep interest.

"Yes," said the lady, "and your face, and voice, and actions, are the same as his would have been. The very moment I first saw you, I was singularly struck by the resemblance, and felt sure that my darling lost child had thus strangely come back to me, after twelve years' absence. I was startled, and the wild hope at once arose within my heart that you would prove to be my child. Alas, though, it is very evident from what you said that you are not my own flesh and blood."

She spoke in bitter tones of disappointment.

"I am so sorry," said Joe, her sweet voice bringing tears to his sightless eyes, and a tremulous inflexion to his voice. "You are good and kind, and I would have been so glad to find my mother—to get some one as sweet as you to speak a kind word to poor Joe. I have had such a sore life of it, ma'am. Grimsby beats me cruelly—see—he just did it again—I am all covered with bruises now, and my body is racked with pains from the damp cellar."

Tears of compassion started to the woman's eyes.

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" she said sympathetically. "I feel for you. This is indeed an evidence of rank brutality!"

She stroked back Joe's hair, and kissed him on the forehead. It made the poor little fellow burst into tears.

Never before had his tender heart been so touched.

Never before had he met with such compassion and pure sympathy from a gentle-hearted, loving woman.

"God bless you for those words, lady," he sobbed, in broken accents. "God bless you!"

The lady started up an instant later.

"Those wounds!" she muttered, chokingly. "They are dreadful! How thoughtless of me! Wait, I will bathe and bandage them for you, poor child, to relieve your suffering."

Joe was sobbing, and laid his head down upon his arm, across the back of the sofa.

Mrs. Howell hurriedly left the room, and soon returned with a basin of water, a bottle of linament, and bandages.

Then she set to work with tender hands, and when she finished her work, the pains in the boy's body and limbs seemed to be vastly soothed and abated.

He thanked her again and again, and the lady cried softly, and tried to cheer him up with comforting words.

He was putting on his jacket, when something dropped to the floor with a metallic jingle.

It had fallen from his pocket.

The lady stooped and picked it up.

"A gold ring!" she exclaimed.

It was the one Joe had taken from the finger of the man whom he imagined to have been murdered.

"Oh," he exclaimed. "Yes, that ring is one I got in curious way, last night, ma'am."

The lady scanned it closely, started, turned deathly pale, and in thrilling accents of alarm, she cried:

"Where did you get this ring? Speak—quick!"

Joe was surprised at her changed, excited tones.

Before he could reply, though, the hall door opened, and the servant came in, accompanied by an officer.

"There's the boy," said the girl, pointing at Joe.

"Where did you get this ring?" repeated Mrs. Howell, ignoring the presence of the others in the room in her excitement.

The girl and the officer, who was a ward detective in citizen's clothing, paused near the door and listened.

"That ring?" said Joe, arising. "Why, I was taken for a thief—for Snags, by mistake, last night, and I ran. I don't know where I went to, but it was into a house that has a side stoop on the alleyway and some kind of a factory at the side. It was near Roosevelt street—crossed it and I stumbled inside somehow. There I stood—in a hall, I believe—and I heard a struggle and a cry of murder—"

"Murder?" repeated Mrs. Howell, with a violent start.

"Yes, that is what I heard, ma'am. Well, I went up the hall in the back room door and got into a parlor. I felt about me and it was in a state of confusion—the chairs and table were upset, and the sound of machinery coming through the wall. There was a man's body lying in the middle of the floor, over which I stumbled. I felt of him and I found a knife sticking in his body."

"And this man?" gasped Mrs. Howell, wildly.

"He was, I thought, dead—murdered."

Mrs. Howell uttered a stifled groan of mental anguish.

"The ring was on his finger. One of the fingers was gone—"

"My husband!" shrieked Mrs. Howell, interrupting him.

"Oh—my!" gasped Joe, in affright.

The lady sank into a chair, pale and trembling.

"This is the ring my husband wore!" she gasped. "His initials are inside—D. H. standing for Daniel Howell."

An idea suddenly occurred to Joe.

"He isn't dead!" he exclaimed.

"How—what mean you?" cried the lady.

"Grimsby just beat me for listening to a conversation he had with a man named Mr. Crosscut—"

"Oh! Dan's step-brother!"

"Dan—yes, that was the name they used."

"The villain! He it was who caused all my misery."

"How is that, lady?"

"I will tell you. But first explain. You said he was alive."

"Yes. They tried to kill him, but they did not succeed. He is to be carried to Grimsby's to-night, to die there, and be buried in the cellar. That was what they said."

"Could you locate the house?" interposed the officer.

"I don't know," replied Joe, dubiously shaking his head. "I will try, though, if you will save the man from them."

Mrs. Howell seemed to be intensely relieved.

"Save my husband," she exclaimed, "and the gratitude of a heart-broken woman will be yours, my boy!"

"Will you explain the cause of the trouble, Mrs. Howell?" the officer asked. "I can then know what I'm working for."

"Certainly," she replied. "James Crosscut and my husband are step-brothers. A fortune left to my husband would revert to Mr. Crosscut if Dan were dead. An enmity existed between them, for my husband is good and just, while his step-brother is a cruel-hearted wretch, and a person who would not hesitate at crime. A week ago my husband went away on his regular trip to Chicago on business. I expected him home next week. Instead, I have only just this moment learned that he has fallen a victim of foul play—this ring and the blind boy's description being sufficient proof. It is my impression that he was waylaid before he could leave the city, and carried to some den where an attempt was made to take his life."

"Then this James Crosscut is answerable for it, eh?"

"The boy just said he was the man in the room."

"And the other," added Joe, "must have been Grimsby. I know how his voice sounds only too well."

"Then they did this job between them, my lad?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure of it."

"Well, then, we must lose no time in trying to find the house in which Mr. Howell is confined in order to thwart any nefarious plans the rascals may have in view. But how about the young sharks who who are coming here to-night?"

"They are all pupils of Grimsby's and live with him, sir."

"Ah! We will give them a warm reception, then. I will have a posse of officers here to meet them, nab them, and haul them in. Meantime, let us go to spot that house."

"And bring the little fellow back here," said Mrs. Howell. "I owe him a debt of gratitude, and will aid him in any way that lies in my power."

The detective nodded, took Joe by the hand, and they went out into the street again together.

Proceeding down to Roosevelt street in a car, they soon gained the corner on which Joe had been left standing in the rain by Grimsby the night before.

Then the blind boy traced his steps over the same path he took when he fled from the policeman, with the unerring instinct of the blind, and came to a pause exactly in front of the alley-way up which he had run.

"This is the place," said he, decisively.

"Sure enough!" replied the detective, "and there is a factory next door from which you heard the noise of machinery."

"What is to be done now, sir?"

"It is a decent-looking two-storied house, the window-blinds closed tightly, and it looks quite deserted. But I am going to force an entrance and see what's inside."

"And I?"

"You remain here until I come out."

The boy nodded, leaned against an iron railing, and the detective went up the alley-way, got in the side door without any trouble, and then disappeared.

A few moments later two men approached Joe.

They were Grimsby and Mr. Crosscut.

CHAPTER VII.

JOE'S DILEMMA.

UNAWARE that his mortal foes were so close at his heels, and wondering whether the detective would find Mr. Howell dead or alive, Joe remained leaning against the railing absorbed in thought, when the two men reached him.

They were astonished to perceive the boy in that locality, whispered together as they approached, and fearful lest the boy had discovered the scene of their crime, they made up their minds to make a prisoner of him.

"He overheard all our conversation," said Mr. Crosscut, in alarm, "and was here last night. There is something significant in that fact, you may depend, for he would not be here for nothing at this hour."

"How in thunder," said the cross-eyed Grimsby, "did ther little wiper get here anyhow? That's wot puzzles me."

"He must have remembered the way he came."

"Yair—he's awful cute an' cunning, if he is blin'."

"Then we had better put him where he can do us no harm."

"O' course we mus'. Le's lock him in ther house."

"Just the plan. There he will be safe enough until to-morrow. That will suit us. We'll have Howell out before then."

With this understanding they approached Joe.

Grimsby raised his hand and brought it down heavily upon the boy's shoulder, exclaiming in gruff tones:

"Blast yer! So this is where yer run ter, is it?"

"Grimsby!" gasped the startled boy, turning pale.

"Ay!" said the dive-keeper, with a curious glance at the bandages on the boy's face, arms, and neck. "An' where in thunder did yer git them air things from?"

He tore the bandage from Joe's face with a rough hand and a brutal laugh and flung it away.

Joe was fairly appalled.

He felt dreadful to again find himself in Grimsby's hands.

Besides, he feared that the detective would now be discovered, suffer rough treatment, and their enterprise would fail.

"Let me go!" he exclaimed, trying to get away.

"Oh, ho! Let yer go, eh? Well, I rather guess not."

"Carry him in," said James Crosscut.

"If you touch me, I'll scream for help!" said Joe, desperately.

"No, yer won't," said Grimsby. "Come along now."

He seized the boy up in his arms.

"Help, help, police!" shouted Joe, at the top of his voice.

He wanted to make as much noise as he could, to warn the detective inside that danger was threatening.

Grimsby muttered something fierce, and clasped his big hand over the boy's mouth to stifle his voice.

"Shut up!" he growled, "or I'll wring yer neck!"

He then followed Crosscut up the front stoop.

His companion had opened the door with a latch-key.

They both entered the house, the door slammed shut, was locked, and Grimsby flung Joe on the floor with rough violence.

"Now yell, gosh hang yer!" he snarled. "No one 'll hear yer voice in this house, so it won't do yer no good."

"Help, police!" shouted Joe, struggling to his feet, uttering a groan of agony, and crawling away from the inhuman monster. "Grimsby, you are a brute. And you, too, Mr. Crosscut."

His voice rang through the still house so loudly, he was sure the detective could not fail to hear it.

Mr. Crosscut caught him by the arm.

Giving him a rough shake, he exclaimed:

"Now, I want you to tell us what you were doing in front of this house just now, and no lies, either!"

"I wasn't doing anything," said the boy.

"Oh, you cannot fool me. Now, out with it!"

"I'm not trying to fool you."

"You did not get here by accident," said the man. "There is some design in this. Besides, the bandages on you show us that you have been in the hands of some one whose sympathy you have aroused."

"A kind lady did that for me," said Joe sulkily. "That is all I've got to say to you about it."

"He's a stubborn brute," said Grimsby in disgust. "Don't bother with him any longer. Le's go up-stairs an' see if Dan's all right; we'll take the little cuss wid us."

He caught Joe by the arm and dragged him up-stairs.

Crosscut followed close at his heels.

Reaching the upper landing, Grimsby pushed open a door and entered a large, square sleeping-apartment.

There were two windows in back, one standing wide open, and the bed looked as if it had been occupied recently.

It was then empty.

Grimsby stared at it, released Joe, rubbed his eyes and stared again, as if doubting the evidence of his eyesight.

"Gone!" he roared, just as Crosscut entered.

"Gone!" echoed the other in alarm. "What is gone?"

"The man—Dan Howell."

"Great Heaven! what does this mean?"

"Treachery! Thunderation, treachery!"

"But he was half dead."

"Some 'un's bin in here an' got him out."

"Impossible—the door was locked."

"The side-door wasn't, though."

"True—that window stands open——"

"An' this kid wuz a-standing outside."

"Then he has brought some one here."

"Sure. How else'd any one know about Howell?"

"Wait, he may not be gone. I'll search the other rooms."

"An' I'm sure you won't find him."

Crosscut ran around, nevertheless, while Grimsby rushed to the open window, and, glaring out, saw two sheets tied together hanging down from a hook protruding from the back of the house beneath the window-sill.

That told how the whole thing was done.

Back came Crosscut, pale and breathless.

"He is certainly gone!" he gasped.

"An' here's how he wuz took out!" said Grimsby.

"Then the boy has betrayed us?"

"Sure enough! Where is he?"

"Gone!"

It was true, Joe had fled down-stairs.

The two men glared at each other, and then made a simultaneous rush for the hall.

They saw the dim figure of the little blind boy hastening down to the lower hall to make his escape.

"After him!" panted Crosscut. "We must discover from the little wretch who has rescued Dan Howell."

"An' I'll kill ther little wiper fer adoin' this!" roared the enraged Grimsby, as he bounded down the stairs in pursuit of the blind fugitive.

Joe heard them coming, and his heart seemed to fairly cease its pulsations with the thrills of fear that darted through him, for he knew that once he fell into the power of his enemies again he would have trouble.

"I will escape them!" he muttered, desperately.

"Stop!" shouted Grimsby, in tones of impotent fury, as he saw the boy groping for the knob of the side door. "Stop, yer warmint, or I'll blow yer brains out!"

He leveled an ugly-looking revolver at the boy as he gave utterance to this direful threat.

"Don't shoot," cried Crosscut, despairingly. "The police will hear the report and come in!"

His warning came too late, though, for Grimsby was a reckless wretch and fired, careless of the consequence.

There came a loud report, a belch of flame and smoke, and then a human cry of distress down in the hall, in the tones of blind Joe's voice.

"I've hit him!" exclaimed the burglar.

He saw Joe throw up his hands, fall beside the door, and lay there groaning piteously for mercy.

The bullet had grazed the poor boy's head, stunning him, and then lodged itself in the wall.

Grimsby imagined he had killed his victim.

It did not seem to give him much alarm, for he coolly made his way down stairs, and reaching the boy's side, turned Joe over with his boot.

The unfortunate little fellow seemed to recover just then, for he got up on his hands and knees, and while attempting to stand grasped his head.

"He ain't dead, after all!" muttered Grimsby.

"Is he badly hurt?" queried Crosscut, reaching his side.

"Naw! Looker there—that'll fetch him, I guess!"

He gave Joe a kick in the side, knocking the miserable little fellow over again, uttering the most pitiful cries.

Just then the parlor door was flung open.

A stream of light came out into the hall from the chandelier, and both men uttered cries of affright, and recoiled at the sight that met their view.

In the door-way stood the ward detective, covering them with a re-

volver, and in back of him, in the room, sat their victim in a chair, pale, ghastly, but living and in his senses, gazing on.

For an instant a grim silence ensued.

Then the detective spoke:

"I've got your victim, and I've got you at my mercy!" said he.

"Now I want you to both hold up your hands in token of submission, or by jingo, it will fare badly with you!"

The two men recovered from their first shock of surprise, and the officer saw by their looks that he was going to have a tough struggle to apprehend them both single handed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VERY HARD FIGHT.

THE two men ran toward the front door, and as the officer emerged to follow them, Grimsby suddenly wheeled around, struck the revolver from his hand, and they clinched.

The officer's revolver fell to the floor, and he began to struggle with his adversary, while Crosscut, seeing what his companion was doing, ran to his assistance.

"Don't let him get the best of you, Grimsby," he cried in excited tones. "If he once gets Howell out of here, we will have all the myrmidons of the law on our track."

"He's a fly copper!" said Grimsby.

Crosscut then seized hold of the officer in back, and they flung him down upon the floor.

"Save me! Save me!" came the weak tones of the injured man sitting in the chair in the parlor.

Joe heard him and groped his way toward the door.

His bare feet touched the detective's revolver, and he stooped over and picked it up.

Neither of the two rascals paid any attention to him then, as their hands were full of work.

Joe could not use the weapon himself, but a practicable plan suggested itself to his mind.

"I'll hand it to the man inside," he thought, "and maybe he will be able to use it. If I should fire, I might hit the officer."

He managed to get past the struggling men, and reaching Dan Howell, whose weak voice guided him calling for help, Joe soon held his hand out with the weapon, and said:

"Here, if you are a friend of the officer's take this and defend him. I am blind and can't do anything."

"Heaven bless you, boy," was the low-spoken rejoinder of the injured man. "You are our salvation."

He eagerly grasped the weapon, and telling Joe to step aside, he fired at Grimsby.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected the two men were startled and demoralized.

They were bending over the body of the detective, trying to bind him with a handkerchief, when the first shot whizzed by Grimsby's head, and, springing to their feet, they retreated into the hall.

Finding himself free, the detective bounded to his feet, rushed back to the sick man, and taking his weapon, he was just about to charge upon the miscreants, when he received a startling surprise.

In through the doors from the back room and the hall door swarmed a dozen tough-looking boys of all ages, armed with various implements.

They were Grimsby's pupils, and had just arrived at the house to help the men to convey the body of Dan Howell away without any trouble.

A word to them sufficed to send the young ruffians in to the assistance of Grimsby.

The detective saw at a glance that he was in an alarming position, from which he could not escape alone.

With this idea he suddenly picked up a chair, sent it crashing through one of the front windows, knocked out the frame, the glass, and smashed the shutter, and picking up Joe, he thrust him through.

"Run!" he cried as the boy landed on the sidewalk amid the debris of the broken window. "Get help!"

The boy needed no second bidding, but sped away.

A few moments later he returned with a policeman, the front door was burst open. When they entered the parlor Grimsby and all his satellites were gone, and the detective, half unconscious from a severe beating lay on the floor clutching Howell.

The arrival of the officer had scared them away before they could badly injure the officer or regain Howell.

The policeman revived the detective, and Mr. Howell was lain on the lounge, weak, helpless, but sensible.

The officer then searched the house, but no trace of the miscreants could be found anywhere.

They were shrewd enough to make good their escape.

The policeman was put in possession of the facts, and went out to get a cab for the detective.

While he was gone the officer began to question Mr. Howell.

"How did you first get into this plight?" he asked.

"I started from home last week to go to Chicago," the gentleman replied, in weak tones, "was waylaid, drugged, and carried to this house, where I only recovered to find myself a prisoner. I remained in a room up-stairs several days, some one handing me food and drink through a panel in the door. Last night I broke the door and escaped, got down to this parlor, and was going out through a window when the burly rascal stabbed me. I lost all consciousness until this morning when I found myself lying on a bed upstairs again. I felt sore in the bosom, and soon discovered where I had been stabbed. The only reason I was not killed outright was perhaps due to the knife striking my suspender buckle and glancing off to one side. Then you came in, carried me down here, we heard my step-brother enter with his emissary and the blind boy, and, well—the rest you know."

"It was a close call!" said the officer. "If Joe hadn't had the forethought to hand you my pistol it would have been all up with us. As it is, I only got a severe drubbing, and will have a chance to get even to-night by catching the young loafers when they tackle your house."

"My house?" queried Mr. Howell.

"Yes—the blind boy discovered a plot of theirs to rob your wife. No doubt Grimsby gave them the tip of your absence from home, and they meant to take advantage of it while they had the chance."

"But now they will abandon the plan."

"Why so?"

"Knowing I am saved, and will go home——"

"Don't you believe it? They don't know Joe apprised your wife, so they will carry out the job."

"Then we will capture the young wretches."

"I sincerely hope so."

"Here comes the cab," said Joe.

The officer lifted Mr. Howell in his arms, and carried him outside, the blind boy following him.

The three then got into the cab, and while the policeman went to report the house at headquarters for the detective, the trio were driven away.

Arrived at Mr. Howell's residence, a good physician was summoned. Mrs. Howell's joy to get her husband back alive knew no bounds.

She tearfully thanked the brave officer, and blessed Joe over and over again for being the means of her husband's salvation from certain death.

Seeing no need of remaining, but saying he would return that night with a posse of officers, to apprehend the young Sharks, the detective returned to the station-house to send out an alarm to capture Grimsby and Crosscut.

Joe remained at Mr. Howell's house.

The lady would not permit him to go, and declared that if he was homeless and friendless, that he would suffer for neither as long as she and her husband lived.

This was a lucky stroke for Joe, the luckiest, in fact, he ever experienced in his life.

Mr. Howell recited an account of his adventure to his wife, and attributed all his misfortunes to the evil machinations of his step-brother.

He, too, was singularly struck at the similarity of Joe's appearance to that of his stolen child.

That happened twelve years before, though, and although he imagined Crosscut had been the rascal who did the deed out of pure malice, he had never openly accused the man of the crime.

Seeing him so intimate with Grimsby, too, the evil rascal from whose den of vice Joe had come, and in which vile place the boy had been bred, strengthened his suspicion that the boy was his own son.

He resolved to force a confession of the truth from Grimsby's lips as soon as the rascal was captured, and in the meantime he added to his wife's entreaties to Joe to remain with them.

It was safe to say the boy did not refuse.

Never before had he known what a good home and a kind friend were, in his lonely life in Grimsby's damp cellars.

He was given a good meal, good clothing, doctored, and when night came, he was given a soft, downy bed to lie in.

Poor Joe felt as if he was in heaven, and sank into a sweet sleep, burdened by the pleasant dream that his identity was revealed by Grimsby, and he proved to be the long lost child of the gentle-hearted Mrs. Howell.

The detective and his men arrived that night, and concealing themselves in various parts of the house, they awaited the coming of the Young Sharks, with the grim resolve to apprehend every one of them.

It was fully midnight before there was any manifestation of their appearance, but as the clock was striking the hour, the street door was softly opened, and a silent band of shadowy figures glided into the echoless hall.

CHAPTER IX.

CARRIED AWAY.

THE detective had his men concealed in various parts of the house, and as soon as the last of the Young Sharks entered the hall and closed the door, a signal was given and the concealed police appeared.

They closed in around the young rascals, and a fight ensued, during which several of them got away, while a few were apprehended by the officers.

Joe was awakened by the noise of the affray, and sitting up in his bed he listened.

Just then his door was flung open and Snags rushed into the little blind boy's bedroom.

The red-haired, single-eyed reprobate was pale with fear, having managed to elude the police down in the dark hall at the beginning of the attack.

Then he had run up-stairs, to try to escape to the roof.

He was startled to see Joe, by the light of the dim-burning gas jet, and paused in the door-way surprised.

It then occurred to him that Joe had overheard his plot to rob the house, and seeing the blind boy there in bed told Snags plainly enough that his betrayal was due to Joe having informed the occupants of the house.

Joe heard the door open and instinctively knew that somebody stood on the threshold watching him, but of course he had no idea who it was.

A look of painful anxiety crossed his face.

Snags did not budge for fully a minute.

He was enraged at the discovery he made of Joe's apparent perfidy, and looked vicious over it.

Closing and locking the door, he glided softly into the room, the corners of his pug nose drawn up, his solitary eye flaming, and one of his dirty hands clutching at his ill-fitting coat, to restrain himself from bursting into an uncontrollable fit of fury.

"Who is that?" exclaimed Joe, sharply.

Snags reached the bedside and caught Joe by the throat.

"It's me! It's me!" he growled angrily. "D'yer know who?"

"Snags!" gurgled Joe, trying to wrench himself free.

"No un else, dat's wot!" said Snags, viciously. "An' I've got der drop on der one wot gived us away now, dead sure!"

"Let go of my throat!"

"I'll le' go o' nuffin'."

"You are choking me, Snags!"

"Dat's jis' wot I wante do fer spite."

He uttered a coarse laugh and shook the boy.

Joe's big blue eyes started from his head, his face grew red, then purple, and he writhed and choked, his tongue lolling from his lips and his body twitching.

Knowing that Snags would maltreat him badly if he did not defend himself, Joe struggled out of bed to the floor and struck out at his enemy with his fist.

It caught Snags in his eye, and the young loafer uttered a roar of pain, released the boy, and clapping his hand to the injured optic, he danced around the room on one leg, vowing direst vengeance.

Joe then arose, and picking up a chair, he stood on his guard, his nick ears listening to every sound.

"You come near me again," he exclaimed, "and I'll give you this over your head, you brute!"

Snags saw Joe's threatening attitude, and seizing another chair, he flung it at the boy.

It struck the chair Joe held, both pieces of furniture fell upon the bed, and the shock hurled the blind boy to the floor in a heap.

"I got yer now!" cried Snags, savagely. "I got yer, an' I'll lay yer out, yer little sneak!"

He rushed up to the fallen boy, and was just upon the point of falling upon him, when there came a sudden knock at the door.

"Hello!" exclaimed the detective's voice. "What's the matter in there?"

"Help! Help! It's Snags!" cried Joe lustily.

"Furies!" ejaculated the thief. "It's der copper!"

Bang! went the officer's shoulder against the door.

It did not break at once.

This gave Snags an opportunity to rush to the window, fling it up, and climb out the casing.

There was an iron water leader close by, which he grasped, and with the agility of a monkey he began to climb down toward the yard below.

Bang Bang! Bang!

A shower of blows rained on the door outside, the lock was broken and it flew open.

In ran the detective.

Joe was leaning against the wall.

"What's the trouble, Joe?" asked the officer.

"Snags came in and is here yet, sir."

"I don't see anything of him."

"He just opened the window, I think."

"Then he has escaped us sure."

The officer ran to the window and glanced out.

The moon and stars lit up the sky, making all surrounding objects visible down below.

He saw Snags climbing over the yard fence, and a moment later scale another and vanish.

"That's the end of that young crook!" he muttered.

"Did he get away?" queried Joe.

"Yes. I may catch him some other time, though."

"Did you capture the others?"

"Three of them. The rest escaped us."

"Perhaps you can catch them by going back to Grimsby's dive—I showed you where it was."

"Oh, they will fight shy of that place now that all are alarmed, and seek a new resort."

"What is to be done now, sir?"

"Nothing but lock these fellows up and catch the rest."

"Can't you find Grimsby and Mr. Crosscut?"

"Although we have searched, and there are men on the lookout for them now, they have so far escaped our vigilance. But tell me, are you injured any way?"

"Not a bit. You just came in in time to save me."

"That is good. You can return to bed now if you like, as there is no further cause for apprehension, my boy."

The officer then went out, and Joe back to bed.

The next day the physician told Mr. Howell that he would soon recover from the effect of his wound, and Mrs. Howell could not do enough for Joe.

A week of quietude passed by.

Joe lived as he never lived before, and was given to understand that he would spend the remainder of his life there, if he chose to do so.

On the following Monday night, while the boy was in the parlor, he heard a ring at the front door-bell.

The servant had gone out to the grocery, and Mrs. Howell was upstairs attending to her sick husband.

Joe, therefore, answered the summons.

A tall man wearing a full beard, a dark suit and a high silk hat, stood upon the threshold.

There was no light in the hall, and at first he did not see the little boy very distinctly.

Joe said, "Well?" and, listening, heard a team of horses attached to a coach out at the curb, stamping on the cobble-stones and jingling their harness.

"There is a boy here," commenced the man, when Joe interrupted him with a cry of alarm, and:

"Oh, you cannot deceive me by disguising your voice, Mr. Crosscut, for I know you."

His acute ears had detected the man's disguise.

The man vented a suppressed exclamation of anger.

Seeing then that it was Joe who spoke to him, and having called to try and get Joe, he suddenly caught hold of him.

"You come with me!" he muttered.

"I won't—let me go—I'll scream—"

"Bah! I have come for you, and I'll have you, too!"

Saying which he lifted the struggling boy up in his arms and bore him out on the sidewalk.

Several pedestrians were approaching, but he clapped his hand over Joe's mouth to smother any cries he might utter, and darted over toward the open coach door with him.

Joe might struggle with all his puny strength now, but it would do him no good, for the man was strong, and held him as if he were a babe.

What did this abduction portend? the boy thought, in an agony of mind. The men had no object in concealing the proof of their nefarious work, for they had been amply exposed, and all Joe could say against them would not do them any extra harm.

The man said nothing though.

His coachman was evidently a party in the plot, for as soon as Mr. Crosscut got into the vehicle with his burden, and closed the door, the driver gathered up his reins, whipped his horses, and away dashed the coach up the avenue.

The man held on to Joe with a deadly clutch, from which there was no getting away, and as the boy was sightless, he had no idea to where he was being driven.

Once he asked his captor the cause of this new outrage, but no reply was vouchsafed save:

"You wait, and you will see!"

CHAPTER X.

A REVELATION TO JOE.

THE carriage went down to the North river, and pausing at an old pier, the door opened, James Crosscut alighted with the boy in his arms, and the vehicle drove away.

The scene was gloomy in the extreme.

Above, the sky was dark and storm threatening, few lights gleamed along West street, and fewer shone along the forbidding river front among the wharves and boats.

There sounded the occasional splash of paddle-wheels out on the water, the dismal clang of bells, and the dull blast of whistles on passing boats, as their dim lights flashed into view and then faded away again.

When the carriage was gone, Crosscut vented a low, guarded whistle, and a shadowy figure came out of the gloom, and hurriedly approached him.

The man carried a lantern in his hand.

He raised it as he drew close to Crosscut, and its flickering light fell upon the boy.

"Ah! Yer got ther young wiper!" said Grimsby's voice.

"Yes, and no trouble either," replied Crosscut.

"Bring 'im out on ther dock."

"Have you got the boat handy?"

"Ay! An' two o' my kids in it."

"Good enough—lead the way with your light."

"Is Joe orright?"

"Sensible, and kicking to get free."

"How'd yer do it, anyway?"

Crosscut explained, as he walked after Grimsby with Joe tightly clutched in his arms, now perfectly passive.

The boy was wondering what they were going to do with him, and knew for a certainty it was nothing good.

The dock was long, dirty, and full of holes.

Mr. Crosscut stumbled over them ever and anon, and muttered his vexation in unnamable tones.

There were no boats moored around the dock either, nor was a soul to be seen anywhere.

When they reached the end, Grimsby waved his lantern to and

fro, and leaning over the string piece, he called out in low, muffled tones:

"Come 'longside here, youse fellers."

"We're ready," came the reply from down on the river.

There followed the dripping of water, the moving of oars in rowlocks, and then a grating noise, such as a skiff would make in bumping against a plank.

"All right yet?" gruffly queried Grimsby.

"Yes. Come on down here," was the reply.

"Bring her under der stairs, boys, we'se got der kid."

More rowing followed, then the announcement in a voice like Snags, that they were all right.

Mr. Crosscut lowered Joe over the bulkhead.

The boy was received in a pair of upreached arms from a boat just below, and then followed himself.

Grimsby was just about to go down, when a lantern flashed a sharp gleam of light upon him.

It was like the glow of a dark lantern, and then a gruff, commanding voice came from somewhere beyond in the darkness, back on the dock, saying:

"Hold on there—I want to see you!"

"Ther p'lice!" muttered Grimsby, clenching his teeth.

"Hurry up, or we will be discovered!" cautioned the voice of Crosscut, from down in the boat.

But Grimsby had the very old boy in him that night, and instead of complying, he uttered a reckless laugh, stepped aside abruptly, and exclaimed:

"Who in thunder be's you, anyhow?"

"Stand where you are, and you'll soon see."

"Ther deuce I will! Drop that light!"

"Ah! I think I recognize your voice. You are——"

"Nick Grimsby, gosh dang yer ugly mug!"

"That's good. I want you, my friend."

"Row away!" whispered Grimsby to the others cautiously.

He then stood up and added, addressing the invisible man who had just accosted him.

"Show up!" said he. "I ain't a runnin'."

The gleam of the bull's-eye vanished.

There sounded the tread of a stealthy footstep approaching, and Grimsby edged back close to the string-piece and listened to learn which way the boat was going.

Then he raised his lantern over his head.

Its light fell upon a uniformed figure.

"River p'lice!" he muttered. "I know ther cuss!"

The other seemed to have seen him the same moment.

"Stand! You are wanted, Grimsby!" said the officer.

"Not much; I won't!" retorted the cracksmen.

He flung his lantern out into the river as he spoke.

Intense darkness fell upon the dock then.

Grimsby did not intend to suffer capture, for as soon as his light was gone he dove head first off the end of the dock down into the dark river.

There came a splash just as the bull's-eye flashed over the spot he had evacuated, and then the officer blew a shrill blast on a whistle.

Grimsby swam like a fish, and having located his boat, he headed for it in a trice.

A few lusty strokes brought him alongside, then several hands seized and drew him in.

This was no sooner done, though, when a long skiff containing three harbor policemen shot around the dock, took on the man from up on the pier, and then darted after Grimsby's boat.

A hot chase then ensued.

The police had their prey in view as they were close by.

The boys in Grimsby's boat were strong oarsmen, and kept their frail craft close up to the piers, in the densest shadows, to escape being seen.

This plan was futile though, for pretty soon one of the officers got in the bow of his boat with a bull's-eye lantern, and held it so that the light shot ahead upon Grimsby's boat, revealing its occupants.

On came the officers with a steady stroke, and Grimsby's skiff rounded a heap of planking that once served as a slip for a ferry landing.

It then flashed up to the old ruined dock, and vanished amid the debris of the ruined float.

Joe was held down by Crosscut as if in a vise.

Another similar boat was encountered, containing more of Grimsby's boys. Grimsby rapidly gave them an order, and they rowed out on the river, to decoy the harbor police away.

This ruse proved to be successful.

Seeing their boat, and imagining it was the one they had been pursuing, the officers gave it chase up the river, and Grimsby and his crew were safe.

Assured of this they all disembarked, leaving their skiff moored to a spile under the ferry dock, and ascended a slippery, broken flight of stairs.

Crosscut still carried Joe, and Grimsby led the way.

There were only two of the young Sharks in the party, and one of them proved to be the sloven Snags.

They emerged into the disused ferry house.

It was dark and gloomy, rotten and deserted.

The street front was boarded up, and nothing but rats and vermin infested the place.

At one side was a room the ferry master once occupied, and they all went in and closed the door, locking it after them.

It was to this refuge they fled when they abandoned Grimsby's sink of iniquity, and free from police molestation they were free to carry on their former nefarious proceedings undetected.

A light was procured and flashed around the room, showing that it contained nothing but a few broken benches and an immense quantity of dirt.

Crosscut then tied Joe's hands and feet with a piece of rope and laid him on the floor.

"There," said he with a sigh. "We are safe now."

"Ay," said Grimsby, with a broad grin, "an' them boys'll lead ther p'lice off on a will' goose chase."

Joe did not fail to listen to what was said, as he did not want to miss learning their intentions.

"Well," said Crosscut, seating himself on a bench opposite Grimsby and lighting a cigar, "now we've got the boy in our possession I am perfectly at ease. I've lost a good deal of money in the furniture of the house I hired, in which I had my step-brother confined, yet I am satisfied. It would have been a miserable ending of what I did twelve years ago—namely, hiring you to abduct the boy from Dan Howell, to let him again fall into his parents' possession."

Joe was fairly dumbstricken to hear this.

He now knew the truth.

He was after all the child of Daniel Howell, and the reason he was abducted was very manifest.

Having been taken from his parents when but three years of age, his father's enemy did not want to permit Mr. Howell to discover that the boy who saved him from death was his own son.

It was a peculiar fatality that sent Joe back unknown to his parents' threshold after twelve years of separation.

But now that he could swear to his identity, he had been ruthlessly snatched away again from the home of his parents.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE FERRY HOUSE.

AN interval of silence followed what James Crosscut said, during which Grimsby filled a short, black clay pipe with tobacco, and lighting it, began to puff away in a thoughtful mood.

After awhile he removed the pipe from his mouth and said:

"How'd yer like ter take care o' ther boy yerself now?"

"I was just thinking of doing it," replied Crosscut.

"You see," said the burglar, "ever sence ther day I nabbed him from his baby carriage, wot ther servant wuz out with, he's been a deal o' botheration ter me, an' that's twelve year now, fer I had ter allers keep an oie woman fer him when he wuz younger. She had a sight o' learnin', too, an' she made a kinder gen'leman outer ther kid like. Yer kin see that fer yerself by a-hearin' him talk."

"Yes, I was surprised, considering the kind of associates he had, not to find him as depraved as the rest."

"Oh, he never was borned for a bum, he wasn't. He allers never took ter no low ways, he didn't, though I offen tried ter make a man outer him wid ther rest."

"I suppose crime was naturally revolting to him?"

"Yair—that's it; he never took ter it."

"I am sorry for it. My instructions to you at the time, I distinctly remember, were to degrade his nature to such an extent that he would become an abhorrence to his parents if they ever discovered his identity."

"'Twasn't no sorter use ter try."

"So I perceive."

"Wot wuz he stoled for, anyway, that time?"

"Simply from motives of vengeance on my part."

"So ho! Did his mother ever harm yer?"

"Not in the least. I hated his father. You see, Howell's mother and my father were married twenty years ago, and Dan and I were enemies from the first. After Dan was married and his blind child born the grandparents made such a fuss over the brat I knew very well Dan would get their estate on account of his child. Nor was I mistaken. Thinking, therefore, that I could place myself in a better position to get the money by getting rid of the infant, and at the same time give Dan a good dig, I paid you to steal it."

"Wot I did," assented Grimsby, nodding.

"They hunted all over for the boy, but never found him, and I went away, expecting to get my share of the legacy. In this I was sorely disappointed."

"How's that?"

"The money was left to the boy."

"Oh, I see."

"His parents were to receive the interest until he was of age, when all would revert to him, if living. After that period, namely, on his twenty-first birthday, if he was not alive, the legacy would be equally divided between his father and I. Or, should both Dan and his son die at any time before the stipulated date, all the money would come to me unreservedly."

"Then ther kid's in yer way now."

"He is. But it will not be for long."

"Do yer intend adoin' him any mischief?"

"I really cannot tell you what my plans are."

"Oh, yer askeered as I'll have a hold on yer?"

"My dear Grimsby, a wise man keeps his own counsel," smiled the other, significantly. "All I ask of you now is to send one of the boys for a salt bag, and for you to give me the use of your skiff for half an hour. Can you surmise anything from that?"

The burglar's rugged face underwent a change.

A rather grim lock overspread his features.

"See here," said he, after a short pause, "I ain't agoin' to 'low none o' that."

"What do you mean?" asked Crosscut in surprise.

"Why, here we've been a-helpin' yer fer nothin', an' when yer talks o' a job wot yer could pay fur, an' a-doin' it alone, I'm a-kickin', that's all."

"Oh!" said the other, with a clearing face. "You want to help me. You want to make a stamp?"

"It's only fair, ain't it, arter all we done?"

"Certainly, if you so desire."

"Then I'll git ther bag an' ther boat."

Joe began to feel decidedly uncomfortable.

"They mean to murder me," he muttered.

"When the boy is gone," continued Crosscut, in cold, even tones, "I will have another hack at his father. I am not yet discouraged. That money is a sore temptation to me, I can tell you, Grimsby, and have it I must."

"But now, as we're spotted, how in thunder are yer a-goin' ter git it I'd like to know?"

"Oh, I have a plan to do it?"

"You'll git nabbed, sure. Ther newspapers wuz full o' wot we done ter Dan Howell, an' I heerd as there's spotters a-lookin' all over fer us."

"Nevertheless, my plan is bound to succeed."

"What'll yer do?"

"Why, it is very simple. I can be supposed to die and leave a son, to whom I will all my expectations. A suit can be brought in the courts by him, good proof of his identity can be established, or rather manufactured. He is bound to win it, and being of age, will get the whole thing in his hands; after which, I take it from him, pay him for his work a good round sum, and the thing is done."

"Oh, it's easy ter talk o' them things, but——"

"And it can be done. I'll risk it. There is no better way that I can think of; can you?"

"Fer my part, I don't know much about ther law, 'ceptin' jails an' sich like."

"Then leave it to me to work the job."

Grimsby sent one of the boys after a salt bag, and paying no attention to Joe, they drew up a bench between them, produced a pack of cards, and watched by the other boys, they began to gamble.

Joe had been trying hard to get free from the piece of rope that bound his wrists together.

By working and straining at them all the time, he managed to loosen them a little.

He did not believe it would do him any good, as he did not know where he was, and feared that he could not get away, even if he did succeed in liberating himself of his bonds.

Yet the impulse to be free was strong within him, so he persisted in his efforts, and after awhile succeeded in slipping one of his hands out of the bonds, entirely free.

He was thrilled with delight, and was going to draw his penknife from his pocket, to cut the ropes around his ankles, when he heard the men move, as if looking around.

The boy had come back with the bag, and the men had looked up on his entrance.

Joe, therefore, kept his arms under his body, and remained perfectly still, listening to what was transpiring.

"Well, got ther bag?" queried Grimsby.

"Yes; had ter hook it, too," said the boy.

"Han' it over. Now, let's lose no time, Mr. Crosscut."

"All right, Grimsby. You hold the bag and I'll lift him in."

They arose, and approaching Joe, the man raised him.

"So you are going to murder me?" asked the boy.

"You heard all we uttered—there is no use denying the truth," said Mr. Crosscut in matter-of-fact tones.

The boy said nothing; he knew it was useless.

An instant later he felt himself being enveloped in the bag, and then the top or mouth of the sack was tied doubly fast with a piece of rope.

Fortunately they had not seen that his hands were free, and the moment he felt sure he was enveloped he drew out his knife and cut the bonds that held his ankles together, totally liberating himself.

He then heard the men whispering together, and an instant afterward felt the bag lifted up.

It was Grimsby who hoisted him upon his back, and slung the bag over his shoulder.

The two men then left the room.

Going down under the broken ferry-house float they embarked in the skiff, throwing the boy in the bottom.

The boat was then rowed out on the river, and Joe heard the men say it was so dark no one would see what they were doing.

Grimsby added that the boy was so helpless inside the bag that he would drown at once.

Then he lifted the bag up, Crosscut having stopped rowing in the meantime, and the boat kept rolling and moving up and down, showing that they were out in the current beyond the docks.

Raising the bag over his head, Grimsby flung it out on the water, and they saw it instantly sink.

Hardly an instant afterward there came a shock, and another skiff struck theirs, throwing Grimsby down.

James Crosscut sprang to his feet with a cry.

A light flashed in their faces, and then they saw that the occupant of the other boat was the ward detective who had helped to save Dan Howell.

CHAPTER XII.

FINIS.

THE detective had been walking along West street when he encountered a policeman holding two of the young Sharks; and recognizing them he accosted the officer.

"Where did you capture those fellows?" he asked.

"Down on the river in a skiff," was the reply.

"What were they doing?"

"Decoyed us away from a fellow named Grimsby, for whose arrest an alarm was sent out."

"Ha! Then Grimsby is on the river?"

"Yes. You know him, eh?"

"I am the detective who sent out the alarm."

"Do you know these fellows?"

"Rather; I've got a warrant for the whole gang."

"Then you are in luck?"

"How so?"

"Grimsby escaped us near the old dock."

"I'll go after him, then, while you take these fellows in."

"Good enough. My boat will soon join you."

"Can I get a boat anywhere near here?"

"Yes; there's a skiff down at yonder dock."

The detective then hurried away, found the skiff, got in, rowed down stream, and met Grimsby's boat as has been recorded in the preceding chapter.

He did not see the cracksman hurl Joe into the river, enveloped in the sack, and was as much surprised to see Grimsby as the thief was to see him.

He dropped his oars, flashed his already ignited lantern upon the others, pulled out his revolver, aimed it at the burglar, and said:

"Pick up your oars and row on ahead of me, Grimsby, or I'll let this thing go off!"

Instead of complying Grimsby fired a shot at the officer, and Crosscut, who was badly scared, rowed away as fast as he could go.

The ball whistled by the detective's head, and he returned the shot, hitting Crosscut in the shoulder.

The wounded man dropped the oars, and uttered a cry.

In a flash the detective rowed up to the other boat, and as he ranged alongside, Grimsby picked up an oar, and dealt him a blow on the head with it, that knocked him senseless in the bottom of his boat, and completely at their mercy.

The burglar then seized hold of him, dragged him into his own skiff, snatched up the oars, and with Crosscut lying groaning in his seat, he rowed back to the dock.

Joe, in the meantime, had sunk beneath the surface in the bag, and as he felt himself descending, he held his breath, and slashed at the inside of the sack with his penknife.

Cutting a hole with one gash, large enough to get through, he managed to liberate himself, and then began to ascend to the surface again.

The boy was an expert swimmer, fortunately, for the evil associates with whom he had lived so long had taught him, when a mere child, at the docks.

When he reached the surface he struck out, but being unable to see, the poor fellow swam up the river at an angle, in his efforts to cross the tide, which he knew went up and down the river.

He had not proceeded far, though, when he heard the dip of oars in the water near by, and knowing it was made by two pair of oars by the sound, he was sure it was not Grimsby's boat, as only one pair of oars had been used in it.

"Help! help!" he shouted.

"Hello! Here is somebody in the water!" said some one.

Then the boy was dragged into a skiff containing three river policemen.

When their identity was made known to him, and they discovered he was blind, he told them his story, and explained where Grimsby was hiding as best he could, having only had sounds to judge by.

They at once surmised it was in the old dock, and thither they turned their boat in a great hurry.

Within a few moments they got in the slip, and forging in under the ferry float they found both the detective's and Grimsby's boats tied there.

Drawing their weapons and lighting their lanterns, they were about to go up the stairs when they heard a pistol shot and a loud cry.

The detective had recovered and was struggling up on the dock against long odds.

The rest of the young Sharks who escaped arrest had arrived upon the scene, joined Crosscut and Grimsby, and the whole gang were surrounding the brave officer to annihilate him.

Just then the policemen and Joe went up on the dock, and charging on the outlaws with their revolvers and lanterns, they drove them back. Seeing succor, the detective's heart bounded, and he made haste to join the policemen.

Joe stood still near the stairs, and the four men then began to blaze

away at the gang, and drove them howling and returning the fire, into the room where the blind boy was carried.

There was no way for them to get out save by the door, and the officers not knowing this, dashed into the room, firing as they ran.

They met with a warm reception.

There came a series of wild cries of pain and rage, blinding flashes and spiteful reports, and the whole crowd became one struggling mass.

The melee did not last long, however, for the last shot was fired at James Crosscut just as he rushed out the door on the dock.

He fell mortally wounded, and the officers having vanquished the others and made them prisoners, came out cut, bruised, but victorious.

The detective found Crosscut mortally wounded, and in answer to the piteous cries of the wretch, told him he was upon the verge of death.

Just then Joe approached and told the detective all he overheard pass between Crosscut and Grimsby, in the ferry master's room.

It astonished the detective a good deal, and Crosscut hearing them speaking about it, acknowledged its veracity to the detective, with the three wounded policemen standing by to witness it.

An ambulance was summoned, the badly wounded were carried away, and the rest were locked up.

The detective then accompanied Joe home, for every one of the Young Sharks was in jail, their ring-leader a prisoner, Crosscut on the point of death, and Joe out of all danger.

Arrived at the house, explanations followed, and Joe's identity was fully established.

The next day the whole gang was brought to the district court, and sentenced to prison, Joe and the detective appearing against them.

The story of the blind boy's life was rehearsed, and when Grimsby

was cross-examined, a confession of the truth was wrung from his unwilling lips corroborating all that James Crosscut said.

He was then held for trial by the grand jury and taken away.

In the afternoon word was sent to Mr. Howell that his wicked step-brother had died of his injuries in the hospital, repentant of his various sins and imploring forgiveness.

His crimes had found him out at last.

Mr. Howell was only too glad to recover his little blind son not to be forgiving.

He amply remunerated the gallant detective for his efficient services, and the officer was promoted for having been instrumental in breaking up the dangerous band of young criminals who had so long defied the law and proven a terror to the public at large.

As for Joe, he found no more brutality and hardship in the future.

His parents were very grateful to get him back, proven to be their child, and tried to make up for loss of advantages the boy had suffered so many years of his young life.

The fortune, which had occasioned all of Mr. Howell's misfortunes, was eventually awarded to Joe, under the guardianship of his kind, indulgent parents.

He was never cured of his blindness, for it was a malady with which he was born.

But he lived just as happy sightless, and when the time came for his good parents to pass away and he found himself a rich man, he did not forget how poor he once was himself.

His charities were innumerable and good, but their recipients never knew who the donor was save by the accompanying name being simply LITTLE BLIND JOE.

[THE END.]

N. S. Wood, the author of this story, is also the author of the following stories published in the WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY: No. 823, "Footlight Fred, the Boy Actor; or, Bound to be a Star." No. 806, "The Waifs of New York."

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